

**FY14 Q2 Report: January 1st-March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2014**

**Submitted: April 30, 2014**

**Reinforcing and Empowering Communities to Overcome the Effects of Conflict in Bambari and Surrounding Areas (RECOVER)  
 Funded by USAID / Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA)**



*GBV Community Counselor (in blue) holding a community sensitization session in one of Bambari neighborhoods –March 2014*

COUNTRY CONTACT	HEADQUARTERS CONTACT	PROJECT SUMMARY
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## 1. Executive Summary

Bambari, situated around 385 km north-east of the capital city Bangui, and host to approximately 45,000 inhabitants, was among the first towns to be taken over by the Séléka during their progression towards Bangui in March 2013. Since December 2012, similar to other towns in northern CAR, Bambari has been in the middle of a politico-military crisis which left it open to the take-over by the Séléka in March 2013. Since March, the town has been under the control of groups linked to Séléka, who have left Bambari in a continuous state of instability. This crisis has had a negative impact on the lives of the civilian population. Human rights violations – such as the enrollment of children into armed groups, gender based violence, murder, and mass lootings - have all contributed to the loss of economic activities, especially agricultural, commercial and pastoral livelihoods. The conflict has also led to breaks in the social fabric of the country. The relationship between the Muslim and Christian communities, which used to be peaceful, has become unstable. Given this situation, Mercy Corps has developed a project to reinforce the resilience of the communities in Bambari, to allow them to overcome the effects of the ongoing conflict. The following paragraphs summarize by sector the principle activities put in place during the second quarter of the project, January through March 2014.

Having continued in the midst of a tumultuous period, following the ousting of the Seleka coalition Government at the N'djamena peace talks<sup>1</sup> on CAR in January 10, 2014, the RECOVER project was successful in carrying out number of planned activities, thus achieving significant milestones to meeting program objectives. Taking advantage of the relative calm in Bambari in January, Mercy Corps was finally able to begin implementation of the RECOVER project and achievements during the reporting quarter include:

- The continuation of the recruitment of program staff;
- Meetings with key stakeholders in project intervention areas;
- The completion of the project's baseline assessment;
- A participatory Labor Market Assessment;
- The review and finalization of project's monitoring and evaluation tools;
- The full launch of sector II activities related to protection and social cohesion; and,
- The launch of Sector I activities related to economic recovery and market systems.

Finally, it would be worthwhile to mention the request approved by USAID/OFDA this quarter, to remove VSLA activities planned under Sector I, due to high risks of insecurity which make this activity no longer feasible.

## 2. Program Overview

The RECOVER program was designed to respond to the mounting protection and relief needs of conflict-affected communities in northeastern CAR. The Ouaka Prefecture has been particularly affected by the invasion of Séléka rebels in December 2012 and March 2013, during which time the population faced widespread insecurity and human rights abuses. The region is one of the most vulnerable prefectures in terms of food insecurity in the country<sup>2</sup> and is home to over 30% of those displaced by the conflict.<sup>3</sup> Almost everyone in Bambari and the surrounding areas has been affected by the conflict either directly or indirectly. Many struggle to rebuild their livelihoods and cope with the psychosocial effects of having experienced or witnessed violence. Through RECOVER, Mercy Corps is building upon the foundation of its previous programming in Bambari providing much-needed assistance in the areas of psychosocial support, GBV prevention and response, health, and economic support to internally displaced persons

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<sup>1</sup> President Michel Djotodjia and Prime Minister Nicolas Tiangaye were asked by the conference of CEMAC Head of States to resign and a new transitional government led by Catherine Samba Panza was elected by the parliament 2 weeks later.

<sup>2</sup> WFP, Emergency Food Security Assessment (EFSA) in CAR, June 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Estimation of Civil Population Displacement in Zones Evaluated by the Protection Cluster in CAR, February 20, 2013

(IDPs). The RECOVER program is responding to the urgent needs of those affected by the Séléka takeover through protection and socio-economic interventions.

**Expected Results:**

- 15,000 vulnerable people, including 2,000 IDPs in conflict-affected communities will have access to protection services, including prevention and response to GBV;
- 2,250 vulnerable people, including 100 IDPs in conflict-affected communities will have restored assets in order to promote economic recovery;
- 900 vulnerable people, including 100 IDPs in conflict-affected communities will have improved livelihoods and income generation opportunities;
- 15 communities (reaching approximately 75,000 people) will have increased capacity to prevent and mitigate the effects of conflict.

### 3. Security

Following the Central African's head of states meeting in N'djamena (Chad), from January 9-10, 2014, which was sanctioned by the resignation of the former Seleka-led coalition government, the security situation in the country remained highly volatile and left many communities uncertain and fearful. In Bambari, Mercy Corps noted that the population expressed fear not only of potential reprisals from Seleka elements, but also from the incursions of the Anti-Balaka militia, which seemed to have had an upper-hand since the fall of the Seleka leadership. Despite the relative calm that prevailed over the Ouaka region, a few isolated but relevant security-related events were registered including:

- The deployment of a significant battalion of international peacekeepers from MISCA and French troops (Sangaris) in Bambari, and their subsequent placement to Ippy (Northern axis towards Bria), Grimari (western axis towards Bangui) and Alindao (South-eastern axis towards Bangassou);
- Two tentative incursions of Anti-Balaka militia, through Kouango (the southern axis towards the DRC) and Grimari (80km on the axis towards Bangui), claiming more than 50 casualties, and the arrest of seven assailants;
- The continued disputes between Fulani pastoralists and farmers preparing their lands for planting crops in many areas surrounding Bambari, including Liwa (South-eastern axis towards Bangassou), Grimari, Ippy, etc.;
- Several joint operations led by French troops of Sangaris and the local military, to track weapons and disarm uncontrolled Seleka fighters;

Nevertheless, none of the above-mentioned security incidents had a significant impact on the course of project's implementation. To date, activities, participants and personnel have not been directly affected by the situation. Mercy Corps continued to closely monitor the political and security situation in CAR and in Bambari specifically, as risks of instability exist for the program. Following relative improvements in the security situation in the country, Mercy Corps increased the radius of its activities from 5 to 12km of Bambari town center.

### 4. Startup activities for the RECOVER project

Project's startup activities continued during the reporting quarter and included the following:

- **Staff Recruitment**

Mercy Corps identified a Program Manager who relocated to CAR in mid-February 2014. Following his arrival, recruitment in-country of national positions for this program continued, specifically for protection and livelihoods facilitators. Four new program staff joined Mercy Corps. However, while qualified candidates for the Protection Facilitator position were rapidly identified, the technical skills required of the livelihoods and microenterprise agents have proven very challenging to find so far. It might be mainly due

to the difficulty to find qualified staff in Bambari, and the reluctance of people in Bangui to be willing to relocate in Bambari. Mercy Corps continues to seek suitable candidates for that position.

#### ○ **Baseline study and Labor Market Assessment**

Due to security constraints over the last quarter in the country in general, and in project intervention areas in particular, neither the baseline study, nor the labor market assessment (LMA) could be carried out in the first quarter. For this reason, the priority in this second quarter was to conduct these two studies prior to rolling out planned activities. The baseline study (to set a benchmark against which progress will be measured), and the LMA (to capture the trends of high-potential growth sector and market opportunities) have both been successful. In total, 375 individual surveys were conducted, using semi-structured interview questionnaires, and of which 275 for the baseline, and 100 for the LMA.

Additionally, Mercy Corps complemented the individual questionnaires with focus group discussions to gather more qualitative information. Both exercises were carried out with the support of Mercy Corps' Economic Market Development team in the US. *The baseline report is submitted as annex to the present quarterly report, as well as on OFDA's ART database.*

#### ○ **Introducing RECOVER with key stakeholders**

In view of rolling out the RECOVER project in Bambari, given the extreme sensitive and fragile environment, Mercy Corps continued to meet with new local authorities. The Program Manager met the regional directors of youths and recreational activities, as well as the authorities in charge of social services. It was not only an opportunity to discuss the upcoming activities, but also to present the program, clarify expectations and define potential partnership terms. Also, a total of 15 traditional leaders (chiefs) and neighborhood administrators were met to clarify project objectives and lay the foundation to a solid community acceptance. Furthermore, Mercy Corps initiated and met the "Platform of Religious Leaders for the Consolidation of Peace in Bambari", which was created in December 2013, at the peak of the crisis, to prevent and mitigate the growing confessional hatred in the Ouaka region.

## 5. Performance Summary

In this second quarter, all activities under sector II (related to protection and social cohesion) have been launched, while Sector I activities are yet at startup phase.

During the reporting quarter, the sector II of the RECOVER project entered its full swing of implementation, encompassing activities such as the psychosocial and medical support to survivors of violence, protection and psychosocial support to children, protection through community networks, and reinforcement of the social cohesion. (See figures in tables below)

#### **Award-level Beneficiaries**

Cumulative Period Targeted		Reporting Period Reached		Cumulative Period Reached	
Total	IDP	Total	IDP	Total	IDP
17,250	2,200	4,121	0	5,351	0

Note: Mercy Corps notes that among beneficiaries reached, there are IDPs who are hosted by family members in the target communities. The total number of IDPs has been difficult to quantify, as these individuals do not self-identify as IDPs.



**Progress to Date**

<b>SECTOR #1</b> <b>Economic Recovery and Market Systems (ERMS)</b>	<i>Objective: Address the urgent socioeconomic needs of vulnerable conflict-affected populations, particularly youth and women, in order to boost economic Recovery and ease the impact of displacement</i>				
Geographic Area (s)	Bambari and surrounding areas, Ouaka Prefecture, CAR				
Cumulative Period Targeted	Total: 2,250	IDP: 200 (will depend on final targeting)			
Reporting Period Reached	Total: 0	IDP: 0			
Cumulative Period Reached	Total: 0	IDP: 0			
<b>Subsector 1.1 New Livelihoods Development</b>					
INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Applicable	Cumulative Period Targeted	Reporting Period Reached	Cumulative Reached
Number of people assisted through new livelihoods development activities, by sex	Male	Yes	450	0	0
	Female	Yes	450	0	0
	Other	Yes	0	0	0
Number of new MSEs started	N/A	Yes	900	0	0
Percentage of people, by sex, continuing in their new livelihoods by program completion	Male	Yes	80%	0	0
	Female	Yes	80%	0	0
	Other	Yes	0	0	0
Total USD amount channeled into the program area through sub-sector activities	N/A	Yes	\$58,800	0	0
<b>Subsector 1.2 Microfinance</b>					
INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Applicable	Cumulative Value Targeted	Reporting Period Reached <sup>4</sup>	Cumulative Reached
Number of people, by sex, or MSEs newly receiving financial services or continuing to receive financial services due to USAID/OFDA support	Male	No	0	N/A	N/A
	Female	No	0	N/A	N/A
	Other	No	0	N/A	N/A
Percentage of financial service accounts/groups supported by USAID/OFDA that are functioning properly	N/A	No	0	N/A	N/A
Total USD amount channeled into the program area through sub-sector activities	N/A	No	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Subsector 1.3 Livelihoods Restoration</b>					
INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Applicable	Cumulative Value Targeted	Reporting Period Reached	Cumulative Reached
Number of people assisted through	Male	Yes	225	0	0

<sup>4</sup> Microfinance related activities under Sector 1 has been removed due high risks currently observed; refer to request submitted and approved by USAID/OFDA.

<sup>5</sup> Though men would not have been excluded from community-based microfinance groups; it would have been the choice of each group.

livelihoods restoration activities, by sex	Female	Yes	225	0	0
	Other	Yes	0	0	0
Percent of beneficiaries by sex reporting their livelihoods restored within three to six months after receiving support	Male	Yes	80%	0	0
	Female	Yes	80%	0	0
Total USD amount channeled into the program area through sub-sector activities	N/A	Yes	\$28,500	0	0

**Sector I – Summary:**

The reporting quarter saw the startup of sector I activities (related to economic recovery and market systems) in target communities. The focus this quarter was completing the Labor Market Assessment (LMA), which will inform how specific activities are carried out under this objective. Mercy Corps also succeeded in holding five community meetings in five different locations to specifically introduce the sub-activities under sector I, including the set-up of resilience groups and the restoration of livelihoods. So far, meetings have been attended by many community members. Nonetheless, while some of them expressed their interest and joy over the opportunities offered to them by Mercy Corps, they equally mentioned their deep concerns about the current security situation, which could jeopardize the growth of any business they may be involved in. Mercy Corps have already registered several expressions of interest from potential groups to enroll as resilience groups. Community meetings will continue till early next quarter as livelihoods and micro-enterprise agents are recruited into the program.

SECTOR #2 PROTECTION		Objective: Strengthen services for conflict-affected children and assist survivors to reintegrate into their communities			
Geographic Area (s)		Bambari and surrounding areas, Ouaka Prefecture, CAR			
Cumulative Period Targeted		Total: 15,000		IDP: 2,000 (will depend on self-identification)	
Reporting Period Reached		Total: 4,121		IDP: 0	
Cumulative Period Reached		Total: 5,351		IDP: 0	
Subsector: Psychosocial Support Services					
INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Applicable	Cumulative Period Targeted	Reporting Period Reached	Cumulative Reached
Number of people trained in psychosocial support, by sex	Male	Yes	0	11	11
	Female	Yes	11	09	20
	Other	Yes	0	0	0
Percentage of targeted children reporting an improvement in their sense of safety and well-being at program close, disaggregated by sex	Male	Yes	75% (depending on final targeting)	0	0
	Female	Yes	75% (depending on final targeting)	0	0
	Other	Yes	0	0	0
Subsector: Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence					
INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Applicable	Cumulative Period Targeted	Reporting Period Reached	Cumulative Reached
Number of individuals benefitting	Male	Yes	0(will depend on cases referred)	0	1

from GBV services, by sex	Female	Yes	0 (will depend on cases referred)	62	114
	Other	Yes	0	0	0
Number of people trained in GBV prevention or response, by sex	Male	Yes	7,500 (approx.)	1,725	2,245
	Female	Yes	7,500 (approx.)	2,396	3,106
	Other	Yes	0	0	0

## **Sector II – Summary:**

### **○ Psychosocial support services**

#### *Psychosocial support services network*

The first refresher training was organized during the reporting period for the 11 female community counselors. At the same time, 20 other individuals (11 males and 9 females) were selected from each community-based protection committee (CPC) and received their first training on GBV cases and related psychosocial issues. In fact, the program has put in place 1 GBV focal point person in each of the 20 targeted CPCs to ensure in depth understanding of GBV and of the existing referral mechanisms. The training focused on the understanding of gender, the definition and types of GBV, the referral system, the mediation techniques, and the basics of Do No Harm.

#### *Play therapy programming for conflict-affected children and youth*

Under the same sub-sector, the project team, in collaboration with the targeted communities (represented by a pre-selection committee), completed the identification and the setup of 27 play-therapy clubs, involving a total of 675 children, (306 boys and 369 girls). A total of 51 trustworthy<sup>6</sup> play therapy mentors (21 females and 30 males) were selected to lead activities in these clubs. The identification of the remaining three clubs, including nine mentors, is underway and will be finalized over the first weeks of next quarter. It is worth mentioning that a week-long training has been scheduled for early next quarter to train mentors on a package of topics including child protection, Do No Harm principles, socialization activities, and psychosocial well-being, etc. as per the play therapy curriculum, which follows the 2007 IASC guidelines<sup>7</sup>.

#### *Promotion of social cohesion (conflict preparedness and response)*

Additionally and finally, the long-awaited activities related to conflict preparedness and response took place over the reporting quarter. Following the initial meeting held by Mercy Corps with the core members of the committee of religious leaders for the consolidation of peace in Bambari, both entities jointly put efforts together to reduce conflict and mistrust and to rebuild the social fabric within existing communities and religious groups in Bambari. It is important to mention that the said committee had elaborated an action plan, which served as a basis to the partnership in the effort for social cohesion in Bambari. The committee has been supported by Mercy Corps through this process as its goals are consistent with the goals of the RECOVER program in regards to community conflict mitigation.

Consequently, the first activity consisting of training local community and religious leaders was particularly relevant given the recent rise in inter-community tensions. Mercy Corps organized a 2-day training for 65 influential leaders (14 females and 51 males) of Bambari communities, in two waves. It is noteworthy to point out the presence of the highest authority of the region (the Prefect) during both opening and closing ceremonies, showing the extent to which local authorities welcomed such kind of training, as a contribution to the dynamics for peace in the region. Topics tackled during the two-day session include “Conflict prevention and mitigation techniques”, “negotiation/mediation and communication techniques”, “universal human rights”, and “risks mapping and vulnerability analysis.”

<sup>6</sup> The Mentors are identified by the communities based on criteria such as: known as very honest and humble; having integrity and respect among the people; a good role-model in the community; having no history of child abuse; etc. and to be literate for reporting purposes.

<sup>7</sup> Inter-Agency Standing Committee, “IASC guidelines on mental health and psychosocial support in emergency settings

○ **Prevention and response to GBV cases (listening center's activities)**

<b>Rape</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Physical violence</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Sexual violence</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Psychological violence</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Denial of resources</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Forced marriage</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Cases outside GBV</b>	<b>4</b>

*Survivors support center activities*

During the reporting quarter, Mercy Corps' listening center took care of GBV-related issues in Bambari and surroundings. 88 GBV incidents were registered by the community counselors (*see breakdown in table to the left*), of which 62 were referred to the listening center for either medical support and/or counseling and psychosocial assistance. Mercy Corps noted an increasing number of marital conflicts over the reporting quarter without an evident cause, and will continue to track this. Overall, the team of GBV officers and community-based counselors received 70

cases to be mediated. The team succeeded to reconcile 38 cases, while 26 are pending and awaiting final agreements between conflicting parties, while 6 were not successful.

*GBV outreach activities*

Community-based counselors conducted a series of community sensitizations this quarter, primarily in the form of discussion meetings ("*Causerie-débats*"). A total of 113 sessions were held, and attended by approximately 2,590 individuals, of which 684 men, 846 women, 415 boys, and 645 girls. The major topics debated on from January to March include psychosocial/moral violence, Women and Peace, and sexual aggression/violence. Also, the topic of community reconciliation and conflict prevention was tackled in February, as Mercy Corps saw the need to mainstream such topics to help boost efforts to the social cohesion by women.

*Community-Based protection committees outreach activities*

Also under this sub-sector, Mercy Corps was able to revitalize the previously-established 11 community-based protection committees (CPCs) and identified 9 new committees - 3 on each of the three axes to Bambari. So, 20 CPCs have been trained this quarter, and are receiving ongoing mentoring from Mercy Corps staff to function effectively. The 20 committees are composed of 4 individuals each, for a total of 80 persons (38 females and 42 males).

For this reporting quarter, the CPCs, especially the previously established ones, carried out sensitization sessions in their respective communities. A total of 32 sessions took place, reaching 1,531 people (319 men, 563 women, 307 boys, and 342 girls). For these first sensitization sessions by the CPCs, the emphasis was put on two topics - universal human rights, and children's rights. Besides, and as part of their daily tasks, the CPCs recorded 301 protection incidents in their respective communities, of which one case was referred to the listening center for more attention.

## 6. Monitoring & Evaluation

Several monitoring activities have been carried out over the reporting quarter. First, a master monitoring and evaluation matrix was established compiling the project log frame, indicator plan, data sources, and monitoring plan. This master matrix helps the Mercy Corps RECOVER program team follow up on all activities and crosscutting issues and ensures effective tracking of impacts for targeted individuals and indirect beneficiaries. Drafts are currently available in French and can be submitted upon request. Also, the team designed the program's detailed implementation plan, and prepared other tools (forms) to be used in this program. Some implementation materials were translated into French and adapted to the program's need and the local context, to facilitate their immediate use upon launching the Sector I activities. Orientation and training materials were also designed for the new program staff, to help them become operational faster.

Besides, the project conducted two studies (baseline and LMA) over the current quarter. The team is currently completing data entry, and a comprehensive baseline report will be submitted along with this progress report.



Finally, the national cluster for protection and GBV sector has reviewed the tracking tool (GBVIMS) and data collection sheet to ensure more efficiency and accuracy in gathering statistics over GBV related cases. The tools will be in use as of the first month in the next quarter.

## **7. Coordination**

Given the complex and fragile situation in the CAR, and particularly in the northern regions, Mercy Corps recognized the increased need for coordination with all stakeholders. Over this reporting period, Mercy Corps coordinated with international, regional and local actors to combine efforts related to security as well as types of programming response. Mercy Corps together with other international and local NGOs in Bambari, and under the auspices of UN agencies (OCHA) held regular meetings to assess the security situation and measures to follow. Also, in an effort to avoid duplication of activities, Mercy Corps strengthened its collaboration with Save the Children International to coordinate on similar activities, as they equally implement protection and psychosocial programs. A sub-cluster on protection was formed under the leadership of UNHCR, and the co-lead of Mercy Corps and Save the Children to share sector-oriented issues and address potential needs/gaps. Also, other international agencies such as Triangle Generation Humanitaire, and International Medical Corps, who operate in the region, are regularly met for a coordinated programming, thus spreading the impact over targeted populations of Bambari.

In addition, Mercy Corps coordinated with the committee of religious leaders for the consolidation of peace in Bambari to discuss possibilities of partnership around post-conflict management and peace-building.

## **8. Conclusion**

Regardless of the challenges and delays due to the volatile security situation in the CAR, the USAID/OFDA RECOVER project in Bambari has begun implementation of activities and will contribute to building resilience of thousands in the Bambari region to overcome the effects of the conflicts. Mercy Corps will continue to closely monitor the outputs and outcomes of the program to ensure maximized positive impact and relevance despite the complex working environment in Northern CAR. With the relative calm observed during this quarter, Mercy Corps anticipates for the next quarter to:

- Launch livelihoods restoration and MSEs support activities;
- Carry out play therapy activities with children's clubs; and
- Strengthen the social cohesion component through mass sensitizations.